

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3961

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL UDORN

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 3567

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OGEN, PINT, LA, TH

SUBJECT: REQUESTS FOR ASYLUM: LAO POLITICAL AND MILITARY LEADERS

REF: A) STATE 115877

B) UDORN 119

C) UDORN 125

1. WE ANTICIPATE THAT, AS THE PROCESS OF SQUEEZING OUT OFFICIALS OF THE VIENTIANE SIDE GOES ON, THERE WILL BE A NUMBER OF REQUESTS FOR ASYLUM FROM FORMER LAO LEADERS.

WE UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEMS POSED BY THE REQUEST FOR ASYLUM OF 100 PLUS MEMBERS OF THE SANANIKONE FAMILY. WE ARE ALSO AWARE THAT THE ARRIVAL OF THE SANANIKONES IN THE UNITED STATES WOULD NOT GO UNNOTICED BY THE PRESS.

2. WE BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT THE SITUATION OF THE SANANIKONES IS PROBABLY UNIQUE AND THAT THERE ARE A NUMBER OF FACTORS THE DEPARTMENT MIGHT CONSIDER.

A) THE SANANIKONES, MORE THAN ANY OF THE OTHER GREAT LAO FAMILIES, HAVE ACTED AS A CLAN AND HAVE BEEN VIEWED AS SUCH. THEY HAVE LONG BEEN PUBLIC ENEMY NUMBER ONE TO THE PATHET LAO AND HAVE BEEN INDISCRIMINATELY ATTACKED BY THEM. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT ALL OF THE PRINCIPAL CLAN MEMBERS, HAD THEY REMAINED IN LAOS, WOULD HAVE BEEN SUBJECT

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TO HARASSMENT, WOULD HAVE HAD THEIR REAL PROPERTY EXPROPRIATED,

AND SOONER OR LATER WOULD HAVE FACED IMPRISONMENT ON TRUMPED-UP CHARGES. WE NOTE THAT THE SANANIKONE'S WEALTH, AS IS THE CASE OF MOST SO-CALLED WEALTHY LAO, IS ALMOST ENTIRELY BASED ON FIXED ASSETS SUCH AS RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE AND FARM LAND. THEY ARE LAND-RICH, FREE ASSETS POOR.

B) THE SANANIKONES HAVE FOR THE LAST TWENTY YEARS BEEN CLOSELY IDENTIFIED WITH U.S. POLICY IN LAOS. THEY HAVE SUPPORTED POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE U.S. (E.G. THE ANTI-NARCOTICS LEGISLATION OF 1971). WHILE SOME MEMBERS MAY HAVE BECOME WEALTHY (BY LAO STANDARDS) IN DOING SO, THEY ARE NONETHELESS TARRED BY THE U.S. BRUSH.

C) THE SANANIKONES MAY NOT HAVE THE ALTERNATIVE OF GOING TO FRANCE. THE FRENCH HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN THE FAMILY'S CLOSE IDENTIFICATION WITH THE U.S. AND THEIR EARLIER ASSOCIATION IN THE LAO ISSARA ANTI-COLONIAL MOVEMENT IN THE 1940'S AND 1950'S; GENERAL OUDONE IN PARTICULAR IS WELL KNOWN FOR HIS ANTI-FRENCH BIAS AND HIS SUPPORT OF U.S. MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN LAOS. (HE ALSO HAS A SON LIVING IN HONOLULU WHO IS MARRIED TO A U.S. CITIZEN.)

3. DURING THIS PERIOD OF CLOSE IDENTIFICATION WITH THE U.S. THE CLAN WAS ALSO UNDOUBTEDLY LOOKING OUT FOR ITSELF. NGON'S REQUEST TO THE CHAGE FOR A SUBSIDY FOR HIM AND THE FAMILY WAS A CLEAR EXAMPLE OF THIS TENDENCY. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN OUT OF CHARACTER FOR HIM NOT TO TRY. WE BELIEVE THAT THE SANANIKONES ALREADY UNDERSTAND THAT THERE WILL BE NO HANDOUTS IF THEIR REQUEST FOR ASYLUM IS GRANTED.

4. MOST LAO WHO DO MANAGE TO LEAVE LAOS WILL NOT BE PARTICULARLY WELL-OFF FINANCIALLY. THE LAO PIE HAS NEVER BEEN A LARGE ONE, AND EVEN THOUGH SOME OF THE PEOPLE NOW SEEKING U.S. HELP HAD MORE THAN A SMALL PIECE, IT STILL IS NOT VERY MUCH.

5. WE DO, HOWEVER, RECOMMEND THAT SERIOUS CONSIDERATION BE GIVEN TO THE SANANIKONES' REQUEST FOR ASYLUM, BUT THAT CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH THEY WOULD HAVE TO LIVE IN U.S. BE MADE EXPLICITLY CLEAR TO THEM.

CHAPMAN

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